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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4550
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0859
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9634
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4146
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1602
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3327
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6729
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4343
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0735
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0736
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0383
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2667
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0311
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000650

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, INR/B; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: CABINET SHUFFLE: RIDE OF THE MAJORS-GENERAL

REF: 04 RANGOON 1437

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Classified By: P/E Chief W. Patrick Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Burmese regime announced on May 15 its first senior GOB cabinet shuffle in over a year. In a series of nine orders, signed by SPDC Secretary-1 Lt Gen Thein Sein, the regime ousted two veteran Ministers, militarized the entire leadership of the Ministry of Immigration, split the Ministry of Electric Power into two separate ministries, switched portfolios between the current Ministers of Cooperatives and Electric Power; and brought three regional military commanders in from the field to join the cabinet. The shuffle was fairly minor by regime standards, but fit a pattern of increasing military control over government ministries. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Rumors of imminent cabinet changes have circulated Rangoon for days. In the May 15 shuffle, the SPDC "granted permission to retire" to two cabinet veterans: Maj Gen Kyi Aung (Minister of Culture) and Maj Gen Sein Htwa (Minister of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement and concurrently Minister of Immigration and Population). The SPDC also ousted U Maung Aung, Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population.

¶3. (U) According to the May 15 orders, there are four new members of the GOB cabinet:

--Maj Gen Khin Aung Myint (Minister of Culture; currently Director of Military Psychological Warfare);
--Maj Gen Maung Maung Swe (Minister of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement as well as concurrent Minister of Immigration and Population; currently Commander of the Coastal Military Command);
--Maj Gen Khin Maung Myint (Minister of the newly created Ministry of Electric Power No. 2; current Commander of the

Western Military Command);
--Maj Gen Soe Naing (Minister of Hotels and Tourism; current Commander of the Southeast Military Command).

¶ 14. (C) National League for Democracy (NLD) Secretary U Lwin, a former Deputy Prime Minister during the Ne Win regime, told P/E Chief on May 16 that he thought the minor shuffle was "just the beginning" of a more substantial regime shake-up. He observed that the changes in portfolios had opened up vacancies in three of the SPDC's regional military commands, the backbone of the regime's control of Burma.

¶ 15. (SBU) Several Embassy sources have speculated that changes within the SPDC itself could be next. The May 15 shuffle, for example, did not account for the fate of outgoing Minister of Hotels and Tourism, Maj Gen Thein Zaw. Late press reports on May 16 indicated that the SPDC had stripped Prime Minister Gen Soe Win of his military portfolio (Air Defense Commander), but as of COB the regime had made no further announcements.

¶ 16. (C) The shuffle could have repercussions for various UN agencies and NGOs which have developed special relations with individual Ministers and Ministries. A senior UNHCR official told poloff that his agency had a long-standing relationship with the Ministry of Immigration, especially the ousted Deputy Minister. Immigration has authority over UNHCR's sensitive operations in northern Rakhine State. UNHCR had also carefully cultivated a relationship with Maj Gen Khin Maung Myint, the current Commander of the Western Military Command, assigned to run the new Ministry of Electric Power No. 2. "Now we are back to square one in Rakhine State," said the UNHCR official.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: The May 15 shuffle was fairly minor by

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regime standards. Nonetheless, the changes fit the pattern of increasing military control over government ministries, notwithstanding a lack of technical expertise. The new Deputy Minister of Immigration, Maj Gen Aung Kyi, for example, replaces one of the few remaining civilians at the senior level of the GOB. The new Immigration Minister is the brother-in-law of SPDC Vice Chairman Maung Aye, placing a key ministry for international organizations under even closer scrutiny and control of the regime's top leadership. Nevertheless, the civilian ministries lack real authority. The real power remains in the hands of the military commanders. The successors in the regional commands will reveal more about leadership trends. End Comment.

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